

4 Advent C 2018 SML
LK 1:39-45

This evening's (morning's) Gospel of the Visitation marks the second of the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary. What was provided in the scriptures, namely, today's gospel account, is limited, so we need to rely on our own imagination regarding all that the Visitation entailed.

While on retreat, I read a book entitled The Life of Mary as Seen by the Mystics. This book is a compilation of visions and private revelations of St. Elizabeth of Schoenau, St. Bridget of Sweden, Venerable Mary of Agreda and Sister Anne Catherine Emmerich, all four of whom were 12th to 18th century mystics. In fact, the visions and private revelations of three of these mystics were used as sources by Mel Gibson in his 2004 movie, "The Passion of the Christ." Before delving into some of what I read, it is important to address the Church's teaching regarding private revelations.

First and foremost, there is a very sharp distinction between the divinely guaranteed, universal "public" revelation which is contained in Sacred Scripture and Church teaching, and the numerous "private" or special revelations of saintly Christian men and women. Private revelations have occurred

throughout the history of the Church and do not require belief, even when approved by the Church. Even when the Church approves them, they are not to be used as deciding questions of history, philosophy or theology.

Second, when visions represent historic scenes, they often have an approximate or probable likeness only. It would be a mistake to attribute historical absolute accuracy to them, just as it would be a mistake to attribute historical accuracy to the four accounts of the gospel. For visions and the gospel accounts, God has a nobler aim than historical accuracy, namely, the soul's sanctification and to reveal the secret meaning of the mystery. There should always remain that superhuman tone that would lead the reader to say, "The source of this is not human." Given this brief introduction regarding private revelations, some food for thought regarding Our Blessed Mother's visitation to her cousin, St. Elizabeth.

The archangel Gabriel had already revealed to Mary that her cousin Elizabeth was advanced in years, and was with child, who was destined to be the great prophet and forerunner of the Messiah, and that it was God's will that Mary should visit Elizabeth.

At this time, Joseph knew nothing of the Annunciation, and Mary did not tell Joseph that she had conceived through the Holy Spirit, but only told Joseph that the Lord had informed her that Elizabeth was with child and that she felt obliged to visit her. So Joseph borrowed a donkey, prepared some provisions, and they, Mary and Joseph set out. It was always my understanding that Mary made the trip from Nazareth to Ian Kerim (the town where Elizabeth and Zechariah lived) without Joseph. It always bothered me that Mary would have made this trip as the route from Nazareth to Ian Kerim was dangerous. It was extremely uphill. The mountains were rough. It was dull, dark, dry, dusty and ugly, and the only way to make such a journey was to walk, or if you're fortunate, to take a donkey. But according to the visionaries, Mary and Joseph made the trip together. (Also, as an aside, while in the Holy Land this past year, on the front of the Church of the Visitation is a beautiful mural depicting Mary on a donkey with Joseph at her side.)

In addition to Joseph making the trip along with Mary, the mystics also noted over and over again that during this trip, as throughout their lifetimes, Mary and Joseph had many opportunities to practice charity. Mary visited the poor and the sick, consoling them, giving from the little they had, and praying

with them. I never questioned that Mary and Joseph were holy people, but I never thought of them as people who performed works of charity. I always pictured Mary as busy with all that entailed being the Mother of God, which of course would include prayer, and whatever else the Mother of God would do.

So that brings us to two days before Christmas 2018.

Regarding Mary and Christmas, 2018:

- ✓ If Mary were to bake cookies, she would have baked them for the food pantry. Better yet, Mary would be running the food pantry.
- ✓ If she were to curl ribbons with scissors, her gifts would find a place under St. Mary of the Lakes giving tree. Better yet, Mary would be in charge of the giving tree.
- ✓ If she were to decorate, she would hang a wreath on the door of a shut-in. Better yet, the shut in would be offered a seat at her dining room table this Christmas.
- ✓ If she were, if she were, if she were.
- ✓ If you were to run into Mary this Christmas, she would somehow, some way, offer you the equivalent experience of the Christ Child wrapped in swaddling clothes.

And all this would be done, proceeding with the same haste, with the same enthusiasm she had as Mary, and Joseph, fled to the hill country of Judah to be with Elizabeth.

Mary is truly the perfect role model as we conclude our Advent preparation, as we welcome the Christ child into our hearts this Christmas. We pray to exemplify you, O Mary, to be as strong, as sensible, and as service oriented as you are. Our Lady of Advent, most blessed of all women, pray for us.